

# Cajon author has ties to Guantanamo

Story by Marianne Mabbitt, Special to the Gazette

The circle of Department of Defense educators include a dedicated group of teachers who are stationed across the globe, educating the children of military families and government employees. Ms. Lydia LaBouliere was educated from eighth through 12th grades in DoDs schools while her mother, Mrs. Sonjalee Pollino, taught on remote bases such as those in the Philippines. Lydia learned to treasure her mother's Cajun cultural background having been raised in New Orleans, La. as well as to appreciate the many distinct customs and people whom they met around the world. Ms. LaBouliere's new children's book, *Gumbo in the Land of Cultural Fusion* is a celebration of Cajun culture and encourages blending people into your own friendship stew. The various characters appreciate each others' differences and lovingly savor their circle of friends.

The whimsically and colorfully illustrated 32-page book is co-authored by Manuel Ivan Cordero who is also a set designer and gallery artist. Both authors have collaborated with entertainment companies including Walt Disney, Universal Studios, and Nickelodeon.

The main character is Cheramie whose name translates from French to "dear friend". He is a pint-sized jazz prodigy whose musical discovery opens the eyes and hearts of all who encounter him. Another character Ah-Lee-On, or alien, is pronounced with a French accent by the author who writes, "no one knew where he came from, but that they'd be friends 'till the end". Other friends include Shrimp Ay-2fay, a pink crustaceous sidekick and "Totsie" a character named for LaBouliere's petite mother. They are all mentored by a musical Pro-

fessor or "Prof" with a trumpet who was inspired by Ellis Marsalis, with whom Ms. LaBouliere took jazz history as a college student.

The rhythm of the verse and the Cajun speech (Patois) will delight readers young and old with lines such as: "Cheramie practiced jazz piano every day and it made his heart sing in every way". Parents may need to explain the liberties taken with English when Cheramie states, "make me some groceries" and "If we miss mamma's supper, she'll boil me for sho!"

Ms. LaBouliere recently read her book aloud to the students at Sampson elementary school, at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to gain feedback from children, parents and teachers. Many students on base have lived in several countries in their short lives. In addition there is a rich diversity of ethnic backgrounds with residents from various parts of the USA as well as from Caribbean and many other countries. Ms. LaBouliere thinks this is a valuable asset in writing and assessing the book. She considered the interaction a valuable "focus group" from which to do market research and develop new projects.

She and Mr. Cordero have already started their second children's book. "Depending on the response to this book", Ms. LaBouliere said, "the characters may grow into an animated series. Currently a major entertainment media company is looking at it for show development"

Whatever future the characters have, the author is considered a guest artist and celebrity in the eyes of many of the students in this community.

## Yard of the Quarter



Photo by MC1 Igo Wordu

**NAVSTA Commanding Officer, Capt. Mark Leary, accompanied by Guantanamo Bay Housing Manager, Diane Blackman, congratulates 'Yard of the Quarter' winner for Villimar Housing Area, the Ackerman family.**



## Ombudsman Corner

**Kathy Diaz**  
USNH Ombudsman  
Phone - 7379  
Pager - 72090, #018  
[kathiuska.m.diaz@gtmo.med.navy.mil](mailto:kathiuska.m.diaz@gtmo.med.navy.mil)

**Jennifer Amaio**  
USNH Ombudsman  
Phone - 7379  
Pager - 72090, #493  
[jennifer.k.amaio@gtmo.med.navy.mil](mailto:jennifer.k.amaio@gtmo.med.navy.mil)

**Senora (Sunni) Malone**  
NAVSTA Ombudsman  
Phone - 77957  
Pager - 4084-2390  
[ur\\_lombuds@yahoo.com](mailto:ur_lombuds@yahoo.com)

**Machele Friend**  
Navy Expeditionary Guard  
Battalion Ombudsman  
State-side Liaison  
[ladysgotshuz@cox.net](mailto:ladysgotshuz@cox.net)